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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [IR](#) [KU](#) [KUWAIT](#) [IRAN](#) [RELATIONS](#)  
SUBJECT: IRANIAN ARAB CLERIC CLAIMS IRANIANS INCREASINGLY  
DISILLUSIONED WITH HARDLINERS

REF: 06 KUWAIT 3535

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reason 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C/NF) Poloff met January 10 with Shaykh Mohammed Kathem Al-Khaqani, an Iranian Arab Shi'a cleric from Ahwaz, the former Arabic name of the predominantly Arab province of Khuzestan in western Iran. Shaykh Mohammed is the second son of Grand Ayatollah Mohammed Taher Al-Khaqani, who, according to one open source report, was an ardent proponent of Ahwazi rights and outspoken opponent of the Iranian Revolution. Shaykh Mohammed said both he and his father were moved to Qom in 1979 and put under house arrest by the Iranian government until Grand Ayatollah Mohammed's death in 1986. In 1995, Shaykh Mohammed fled to Syria where, despite being harassed by Syrian intelligence, he remained until 2004 when he moved to Kuwait. Although he claims to have close ties to many Shi'a clerics in the region, Shaykh Mohammed said he does not maintain relations with Kuwaiti Shi'a clergy because, according to him, the majority are ideologically affiliated with the revolutionary government in Iran. He also noted that he has not been harassed in any way by the Kuwaiti government.

¶2. (C/NF) Shaykh Mohammed claimed the Iranian people were growing increasingly disillusioned with the hardline regime in Tehran. He cited corruption, oppression, and poverty as the main reasons for this disillusionment. According to him, this sentiment was also widespread among Shi'a clerics and theological students in Iran. (Note: Shaykh Mohammed taught at a theological school in Qom after being released from house arrest in 1986. End note.) Shaykh Mohammed predicted the Iranian people would support a strong, united opposition movement against the government if one were to emerge. He was not overly optimistic, however, that such a movement would form in Iran in the near future.

¶3. (C/NF) Comment: Shaykh Mohammed appears to be in his early-40s. He spoke in Arabic throughout the meeting and seemed to understand very little English. He lives in a modest apartment with his family. Although he claimed not to be affiliated with any particular Ahwazi opposition group, Shaykh Mohammed appears to have some connection to the Democratic Solidarity Party of Al-Ahwaz (reftel), a representative of which requested the meeting on the Shaykh's behalf. End comment.

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LeBaron